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The God of Israel.

A DISCOURSE
By
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THE GOD OF ISRAEL.

A DISCOURSE PREACHED BEFORE SINAI CONGREGATION SUNDAY, NOV. 19, 1905.

BY EMIL G HIRSCH.

Text: Amos II.

We are not fond of theological subjects. We have an instinctive aversion to their discussion; and our prejudice is justified to a certain extent. Ordinarily theology is as dry as dust. It is always under the suspicion of being more or less empty sound, a convenient verbal screen behind which squats chattering ignorance. Moreover, in antithetical contrast, religion ought to be the magnet to unite men; theology has always been the potent instrument of division. On the great fundamental aspirations for which religion would find sign and syllable, men could easily agree, but concerning the subtle distinctions with which the theologian juggles, there is wide latitude of often bitter and embittering difference of opinion. In this antipathy to theology, however, we sometimes allow ourselves to be carried too far. We should not forget that none of the many seemingly meaningless theological concepts and constructions but anticipates and affirms ethical motives and moral outlooks.

If I know what my neighbor admires I have the

data to read his character without running the risk of straying off in my delineation on a tangential line. He who loves art shows by his affection that his mind strives for higher things and clearer uplooks than those dimmed by the dust of the street, and drowned in the din of the market, dotted by the dross of the mint, distorted by the darkness of the mine. If I am informed on your vision of the Godhead, I am in possession of the key to the innermost secrets of your spiritual and moral being. Creeds are therefore not altogether unserviceable. While they fail to articulate absolute truth, they are tell-tales of the impelling motives which the creed-builders believed to be fundamental, and of the visions of perfection which they cherished. This holds good of especially the verbalized consciousness of historical communities or larger fellowships. What is emphasized by them in terms of dogma is of importance not as the final expression of truth absolute, but as the guide post to the direction of the thought, as the indicator of the vitalities in the historical community's ambition. It shows what in the estimation of church or synagogue is precious and would pass for the highest and noblest interpretation of life.

I would have you remember this view of the truth of credal formulæ as you approach with me this morning's theme. I propose to talk on "the God of Israel." The God of Israel? Methinks I hear at the very threshold the objection that if God be he must not be qualified as the God of Israel. God to be God must be the God of all men; the one God of the universe. To be God he must vouchsafe his love not merely to one petty tribe and people, but to all the families of earth; nay, in his parental solicitude he must em-

brace not merely this, our little planet, or the group of planets of which ours is one, but the uncounted millions of sidereal bodies that whirl and blaze in the immensities of space. A God limited lacks the very essential implications of the God-head. With what right then do I associate with the solemn name symboling eternity and infinitude, the predicate suggesting restriction and exclusiveness?

In truth, this very objection which I feel lingers on your lips has been urged against Jew and Judaism since Judaism's voice first was entoned on this, God's spinning footstool. The Jew, they have said, worships a national God. He invokes as the highest a power that cares for him, but has no love for others. Hoary with centuried snow as this accusation is, it has become young again in these latter days. It is a familiar guest in pulpits that hail Calvin as the final interpreter of Paulinian Christianity; it is entertained with profuse hospitality on platforms that will not admit to speech Zwingli and Luther, and by speakers emphatic in their declarations of love for all mankind, their loyalty to truth, their zeal for freedom of conscience and enlightenment of mind. From both camps, however wide the breach between them, the cry goes up: Jews proclaimed a God who was their God, and no one's else, until the Teacher of Nazareth came to earth. The burden of this great man's message was that God was not father of one people, but of all mankind. But the Judaism of his time and of all times, according to them, was so stubbornly saturated with its own nationalism as to dull all sympathy and responsiveness for the truer appeal of the broader love that fell from the lips of the lowly Nazarene.

Of course Biblical criticism has been invoked to

confirm this construction of Judaism's fatal conceit. Not merely strange but sad and heart-oppressing, are the tactics of our liberal friends, always ready to lend credence to Biblical criticism when Judaism seemingly is unmasked a pretender and branded a lower form of religious and moral civilization, but always deaf to the same criticism the moment their pet theories are endangered. They have adduced from the study of the Old Testament as conducted by the new school of Biblical interpreters proof upon proof to the effect that the Yaweh of the Old Testament is a national God, while the Lord of the New Testament is an universal God. Has not Delitzsch, the greatest Assyriologist of Germany, in his series of lectures entitled "Bible and Babel" made this assurance doubly sure? Forsooth, he has collected with laudable industry fragments and passages from Old Testament literature that go far to trestle his theory. But he has forgotten to bring forward other passages that are in diametric and dynamic opposition to his favorite contention. I, for one, concede that at ONE time the ancient Hebrews worshiped a tribal God. Of this remote Hebrewism there are undoubted traces in Biblical literature. Just as vestiges of former geological periods are left in the rocks, so in literature are sometimes discovered fossils of former civilization, shells, as it were, and petrifactions tokening the sweep of religious ideas antedating the later development of the people's spiritual life. Even the Book of Isaiah in one of the numerically late chapters has preserved the fanatic fervor of an old Hebrew calling upon his God to crush under foot the enemies of his people. Delitzsch is right in declaring that this chapter in Isaiah documents a spirit of intense tribalism. But he forgets to add, though he knows it, that

that chapter is not by Isaiah, that it came to be in the collection bearing that honored name by accident. It is, one might say, a bowlder rock, a witness to the glacial period, left behind when the ice fields retreated to their mountain cradle. This chapter is a monument of a former religious age. In the Pentateuch many and many an expression occurs easily detected to be the echo of the ruder melody of tribal religiosity. When, for instance, the ark started on the onward march—and the ark was the warrior nation's war palladium—the shout went up "Koomah, Yahweh," "Rise, Oh Yahweh; let thine enemies be scattered and them that hate thee be dispersed." This old war shout found a place in the later Jewish ritual, but it was eliminated therefrom by the Reform Rabbis, and it may be of interest to you to remember that in this congregation this omission was insisted on from the first, Dr. Chronick, your Rabbi, objecting, as did my own father, to the retaining of this passionate battle hymn as the solemn prelude to the opening of the shrine containing the scroll of the Torah. We grant that echoes of tribalism are heard by the reader of old Hebrew poetry. But though Delitzsch and his followers of liberal and illiberal pretensions against better knowledge have forgotten to add this, the Religion of the Prophets, OUR religion, has outgrown and denied and deplaced old tribal Hebrewism and clan-Semitism. In ignoring this, in suppressing this vital fact and difference, Delitzsch has laid his silence open to the suspicion of being influenced by dishonest prejudice. Alas! this method of double dealing is not a stranger in most of the liberal pulpits. Delitzsch is invoked as authority by all of them when our religion is under examination, though the duplicity of his tactics is apparent and palpable.

The same criticism which points out the tribalism of the Old Testament disproves the universalism of the New Testament. The picture of Jesus is by no means fixed in the gospels. Virtually four variant conceptions of the Teacher are incorporated in the Evangels, while a fifth and one radically different from the others is that of the writings of Paul. According to one Gospel Jesus was as intensely national as ever was Jew; yea, most narrow was he in his nationalism, and most unhesitating was he in the strong use of phraseology to give it force and sting. He refused to heed the cry for help of one not of his people on the plea that the bread intended for the children of the household should not be cast to the dogs. The word appearing in the Greek text carries a still stronger contempt than is vocalized in the English. He would not himself pass through Samarian territory recognizing the prejudice of his co-temporaries according to which contact with the Samaritans defiled. He cautioned his disciples against holding concourse with these semi-Jews. Of course, such indications of nationalism are toned down in other presentations of the attitude and advices of the Nazarene. The "higher criticism" which supports the detractors of the Old Testament might be cited into court to good advantage by one eager to point out defects in the new. At all events, this "higher criticism" has made it clear that we know almost nothing of the historical Jesus and that the few disjointed data at our disposal confirm as strongly the conception of Jesus as an arch-nationalist, as they do the contrary view that he was the preacher of the most inclusive universalism.

This one fact is sure that for universalism the synagogue's Haggadah contemporaneous with the N. T.

Midrashim occupies as lofty a crest as ever was reached by the latter. Every utterance imputed to the "Master" has counterpart and analogon in the sayings and parables of the Rabbis of the decades when the gospels took on written form. The universalistic Jesus is counterbalanced—if not prototyped—by the universalistic Abraham. It is true the latter is a figure of the poetizing Midrash. But so is the former. After all, Midrash and myth are truer revelations of the aims and insights of their authors and transmitters than are dead facts and dreary figures. The Abraham of Rabbinical fancy discloses the verities considered to be supremely and sublimely vital by the Rabbis. When they construe him to have been the missionary of universal truths, the eager host of men of all races and regions for the easy reception of whom he built his tent where all roads converged and with doors open to all wayfarers, they give him meaning exponential of their own missionary passion and their own philanthropy, in the etymological sense of the term.

But of this universalism of the synagogue ne'er a syllable: of this nationalism of the nascent Church ne'er a whisper. A hurricane of denunciation, however, and of distrust concerning the narrow tribalism of Judaism and its racial arrogance. In view of this constancy of the perverting ignorance and malice, it behoves us to analyze in detail the true implications of the phrase "the God of Israel." If it be heavy with bigotted tribalism, let it be amended, yea, disappear from our vocabulary. But is it?

The first prophet in whose preachment is heard the assumption that God is Israel's God is Amos. "Only you have I known of all the families of earth," you remember is his proposition. Is this, his fundamental

contention the acme of insane nationalism? The very context might give the negative answer. Before leading up to this climactic announcement, the Prophet surveys the fate of the surrounding peoples and accentuates the solemn certainty that they are subject to the chastising justice of God. Amos thus could not have intended his apostrophe to Israel to suggest territorial or national limitations for the sweep of God's awful solicitude. In "knowing" Israel of all the families of earth, according to the man from Tekoa, YAHWHE did not abdicate His guidance of other dwellers under the sun.

But perhaps this must be held to have been the one vital accent of this declaration that Israel by virtue of having been thus "known" enjoys privileges denied all others. They who know nothing of our own convictions, of the teachings inculcated by the competent expounders of our religious philosophy, have indeed never scrupled to impute to Judaism and its professors this interpretation of the prophet's insistence. We have been denominated the "chosen people" and are accused of twisting this appellation into justification of pride and presumption exhibited especially in contempt for all not of our blood or our community. When two years ago, Kishineff's horrible story stirred the heart of the civilized world, a writer in what purports to be the organ of inclusive fellowship in religion argued that such atrocities were the natural reaction against the doctrine of the chosen race by the adherents of the counter conceit of the chosen creed. The hapless victims of Russian barbarism paid the forfeit for their belief that "of all the families of earth God had known only them." Now that eighty and more Kishineffs have

filled with new unspeakable horrors the blood wet annals of "man's inhumanity to man," another liberal philosopher has arisen to reaffirm this profound observation. By the utter folly of the Jewish dogma culminating in the insolent assumption of racial distinction, the hapless and helpless denizens of that Inferno, the Russian Pale, have provoked the lamblike patient Mujik to bitter resentment and bloody reprisal. It is, indeed, easy to pose as a profound philosopher. But through the rents in the Antisthenes cloak worn with gusto by our liberal pseudo-philosophers, naked anti-Semitism of the vulgar ignorant sort is easily discovered. One line more of Amos might have disabused these giant brains of all misgivings.

Does Amos proceed to draw from his premise the conclusion that Israel enjoys immunities denied other peoples? The contrary is his deduction. Because Israel stands in relation to YAHWEH as does none other, greater burdens are laid on him, more exacting responsibilities have fallen to his share. As Amos interprets his theological reading of Israel's appropriation by God, the people's selection confers no prerogative whatsoever, but, to the contrary, involves more unrelenting accountability.

The student of the primitive germinal thoughts from which the latest dogmas of religion are the fuller fruitage knows that at the root of Amos' tenet that YAHWEH has claims on Israel are certain historical facts. Though the God-idea that animated the shepherd tribes in their worship of the Deity enthroned on Sinai differs from that central in our own religious consciousness as strikingly as does the full splendor of the sun-flushed noon hour from the uncertain blushes of the

mist-hung dawn, in so far even this shadowy perception was of determinative moment for all future religious progress as it accentuated the irrevocable covenant between Sinai's awful "holy" unapproachable God and Israel. In other words, by virtue of that covenant, Israel never again was free to choose another God. It had been chosen by its God.

Among other peoples, the idea is met with of their being the wards of their tutelary deities. But in none of these widespread conceits is the one element that Amos brings out so forcibly, the one dominant note. The tutelary God grants impunity and immunity to his own. The God of Israel imposes burdens on and exacts service from his people and visits its transgressions with severity unrelenting.

For to-day, I shall not consider at length the successive historical events which helped this doctrine to win gradual acceptance. Nor am I interested in the occurrences that prompted Amos to so enunciate his philosophy of Israel's history. But of great importance it is to set forth this doctrine in its true colors. None of the teachers that after Amos declared or defended the historical doctrine of Israel's election and selection, but like this prophetic first sponsor thereof was emphatic in explaining its implications as greater service and stricter reckoning.

As for the doctrine itself, Amos and they who after him developed it, enunciate a general law in a particular application. Or will any one doubt that the law of election and selection is operative in all human experiences and all the affairs of men? Are men equal in endowment? Is the same opportunity offered to all alike? Why is not every one of us an Edison, a Morse, a Lister, a Mommsen, a Lincoln, a Washington? Are

not Goethe, Shakespeare, Dante, Aeschylos signal examples of the working of the mysterious force and plan which theologians have labeled the process of election through divine grace? I know we have consulted sky and soil, environment and ancestry as the oracles explaining the mystery and the majesty of such distinction as comes to the rare men of creative genius. But even if the Pythian answers were clearer than they are, would they lift the curtain altogether? Would not the tantalizing puzzle confront us after all why to one the parentage productive of genius was granted and denied to another; why the one found an age prepared for his coming while the other was born into times callous to the message? No! in this unsolved puzzle looms large before us the mystery and the might of a Law and Will that chooses one for the crown and another for the cross.

Nations and groups of men are as clearly under the dominion of this law as are individuals. Greece was chosen for the ministry of beauty; Rome was given opportunity and faculty for political world-empire building. The Anglo-Saxon is called to pioneer duty; his is the "burden of the white man," to use a significant phrase of one of his chosen bards. Is it then inadmissible to speak of Israel as a chosen instrument through which the plan and purpose of his God is realized? In the economy of humanity, to Israel was assigned the function to be the "people of the book." Duty was his dower. Righteousness through private sanctification and social co-operation in enjoining justice was his incessant obsession. His history was so guided that in ever deeper measure the consciousness took possession of Israel that this priesthood was his task at the altar of humanity. No merit of his entitled him to this

sacerdotal mitre. Modestly he ascribed his appointment to the "merit" of the fathers. Their "love" had won for him the call to his responsibilities. The grace of God had chosen him not to higher prerogatives but to sterner obligations.

And let us not forget that as a corrolary of this concept from Amos down to the latest expounder of the doctrine, Israel has been taught to know that not merely "sufferance," but *suffering* is the badge of his pilgrim tribe. His tears annointed every stone that first rejected by the builders became later the cornerstone of God's larger Temple. Recent events have again exemplified the truth of this interpretation of our part in the tragedy through which God works to conclusion his purposes. Because justice is our pole star, we must suffer the martyrdom of injustice in order to demonstrate the impotence of injustice. Righteousness being the lamp to our feet we must follow it though the way lead over stones and thorns, through fire and flame, yea, into the mouth of death.

Will you argue now that all this is fine-spun illusion? I shall accept your judgment and still cling to my conclusions. Modern psychology has taught us the value of just such illusions. Sitting at her feet, we have learned that men are moved by their illusions much more powerfully than by their clear knowledge and crisp cold certainties. Illusion has led men away from brutalism. It has sent out men to battle-fields where civilization was the price of victory. If oceans have lost their terrors, it is due to the spell of illusions. Vision is the life bread of the spirit and by this staff of life the greatest have been empowered to foresee and to foretell, thus lifting them of duller eye and unimaginative heart to nobler peaks of outlook. The illusion that

we are called to essential responsibility and the ministry of humanizing suffering is of peril only when we become false to its beckoning. We must make good our title to our election by conduct and ambition such as befit him who believes himself chosen. Only then may our "illusion" be censured as insufferable arrogance when disloyalty to the obligation of which it is the dream marks us as unworthy pretenders, or cowardice which shrinks from the suffering that ransoms the distinction, blanches our cheek and curves our then cringing back. The Jew who acts upon the theory that he is chosen to be a blessing will be a blessing. This illusion will attune his soul to genuine humility—a humility equally distant from vainglorious self-laudation and characterless unprincipled self-deprecation. The consciousness of the service laid on him will sustain his self-respect, his courage, his hopefulness should a whole world rise up against him in ignorant hatred, with affectations of superiority, and meet him in vulgar prejudice and unfounded distrust.

But there is another content to the phrase "God of Israel" which cannot be too often expatiated upon. It was Israel that through the prophets recognized that God could not be worshiped except through righteousness and justice. Ethical is the monotheism of Judaism. A new departure in the interpretation of religion was made when the God of Israel was proclaimed. Israel was to God no more than the sons of the Kushiyim; the Philistines as well had God led to their destiny. But Israel was to make his God consciousness an ethical force. Amos censures his people for neglect of social righteousness, while addicted to ritual rectitude. God has not commanded sacrifices. Sacrificial piety may be paid to Saturn and other deities not to the God

of Israel. Impatient is this God of Israel of social unrighteousness. He will not suffer the religion which while observing Sabbath and new moon exploits the necessities of the common people. He has only contempt for the mighty of earth that sell the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals; that rob the widow and despoil the orphan. Justice, justice is the one sacramental appeal of Israel's God-consciousness.

This irrevocable identity of religion and ethics is the keynote of Israel's message. Israel did not have to wait for new prophets to learn that righteousness is the one and all of the true religiosity. Amos the sponsor of the doctrine that Israel and God are inseparable is also the most passionate proclaimer of the absolute congruence of religion and morality.

The God of Israel cannot be served by prayer, by sacrifices, by Sabbath observances, by new moon and festal rite. These are secondary; they are if of any of little moment. But the God of Israel demands respect for the humanity of the lowliest and least in the social order. He despises the mighty and will depose them from power if their wealth is tainted, their success has spelled oppression of others. These "kine of Bashan" stretched out on couches of ivory though they paid tithe to the priest, he would hurl into the dust, they the insolent devourers of the people were growing fat on iniquity and chewing their cud in comfort while owing to social exploitation of which they were prime beneficiaries, want and distress harressed the best of the nation.

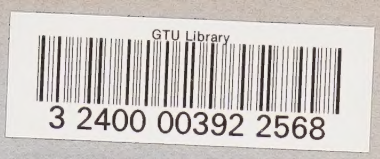
In view of this originality of conception certainly Israel is justified to speak of *his* God as long as they are numerous who believe that God and religion have no relation to social adjustments; that religion is a

scheme to win salvation for self while this world is given over to cunning and robbery, the stronger always prevailing in it and harvesting the spoils.

The God of Israel! Yea, Him I declare. I cannot define Him, I know Him, the One not myself making for righteousness; He has called me to service; as I am the son of Jewish parents He has laid on me this historic duty, to be exemplar to others; to be if He so wills one of the sufferers for the good of all, that righteousness may triumph and justice may extend its reign.

I believe in the God of Israel. I see Him pass before me, though I cannot see His face; and over the tumult of the ages I hear His voice, "Adonay, Adonay El Ra'hum we'hannun. I, Israel's God, am unchangeable, mercy universal, grace incomprehensible, justice ultimately triumphant, righteousness established on pillars that cannot be moved." I hear His voice when I read the story of the Jew; the Jew, weak yet unconquerable; less in numbers than others, yet indomitable; poor yet proud in his consciousness that poverty and wealth are accidents, and character is essential. I see my God; I hear His voice as I read Israel's story wet with tears and red with the blood of martyred generations. Had the heroes lied they would have been safe; had they spoken what to them was untruth, the world would have acclaimed them noblemen; laurel wreaths would have been theirs, and coronets would have been their reward; gold and silver would have been showered upon them. They suffered, spurned the gold, scorned the honor, but remained true to themselves and the God of Israel. I hear that God, and I see Him when turning from the past to the future, and behold in undimmed promise the vision of the world made one and perfect, in justice and righteousness. In a temple reared by humanity I behold not only

Israel, but all mankind gathered as the one God's people in love to do service to the God of all, whom Israel was the first to understand as the ONE that asketh not but giveth, depiseth sacrifice and esteemeth not ceremony, the ONE whose throne is to be pillared by men on righteousness, love and justice. This God is the God of Israel. Amos, the Jew, first learned to read the eternal law of His will and light up the mystery of His unfathomable essence. The God of Israel, He sleepeth not, nor doth He slumber. His purposes will come to pass. Let kings rage and nations plot, He laughs them to scorn, for righteousness will triumph and wrong will fail. Such is the will and the decree of my God, the God of Israel.



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